

The Task Force On Urbanization And The Future

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Report on a
Seminar held at
Government House, Edmonton

December 14, 1971

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SEMINAR AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1971

PRESENT:

Alberta Bureau of Statistics
Alberta Government Telephones

Alberta Hospital Services Commission

Alberta Housing Corporation
Alberta Housing Corporation

Calgary Power

Calgary Regional Planning Commission
Calgary Regional Planning Commission
Central Mortgage & Housing Corporation
City of Edmonton Planning Department
Department of Agriculture (Resource Economics
Branch)

Department of Environment (Water Resources
Division)

Department of Highways (Planning Branch)
Department of Industry (Economic Research
Branch)

Department of Industry (Industrial Development
Branch)

Department of Labour
Department of Labour
Department of Lands & Forests (Timber Branch)
Department of Manpower and Immigration

Department of Municipal Affairs (Provincial
Planning Branch)

Department of Regional and Economic Expansion

Edmonton Regional Planning Commission
Human Resources Research Council
Red Deer Regional Planning Commission
Red Deer Regional Planning Commission
Research Council of Alberta (Industrial and
Engineering Services)

Statistics Canada
Task Force on New Incentives for Albertans
Task Force on Provincial/Municipal Financing
Task Force on Urbanization
Task Force on Urbanization
Task Force on Urbanization

Task Force on Urbanization
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John K. Kenward, Task Committee
Co-ordinator

F. Marlyn, Research Director

R. G. Ironside, Professor

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Deficiencies in Data	2
Retrieval of Data Available	5
Economic Growth Studies	7
Population Projections and Mobility Studies	8
Studies on the Delivery of Services	9
Co-ordination of Studies	9
Role of Universities	12
Policies and Programs for Declining Areas	13
Co-ordination of Planning	15
Summary and Conclusions	17



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INTRODUCTION

On December 14th, a seminar was held in Edmonton to discuss economic and population growth in Alberta, and trends in the distribution of activities across the province.

The emphasis was on information available, studies completed and research underway, particularly in terms of what needs to be done and what are the difficulties being encountered by researchers and planners. The afternoon session also dealt briefly with substantive issues such as incentive programs for declining communities, growth centres, regional plans, etc.

The people attending represented federal, provincial, regional and city agencies, universities, research councils and private concerns engaged in this field.

In addition to the Task Force on Urbanization, two other provincial task forces were represented: The Task Force on Provincial-Municipal Financing and The Task Force on New Incentives for Albertans. The seminar was an efficient way in which these Task Forces could acquaint themselves with the data and research available in terms of their areas of concern.

It was felt that this exchange of information would also be of value to the other agencies attending and would contribute towards a more effective use of Alberta's research resources.

To provide background information for the seminar and to provide a basis for discussion, a questionnaire was sent to each agency prior to the seminar and the results distributed to all participants. (See Appendix 1)

The results provided a partial inventory of research completed or being carried out on these matters. It was a useful indicator as to where there would appear to be overlapping effort or where deficiencies may exist in our research.

The comments and discussion of the seminar can most usefully be summarized under a number of headings:

1. Deficiencies in Data
2. Retrieval of Data Available
3. Economic Growth Studies
4. Population Projections and Mobility Studies
5. Studies on the Delivery of Services
6. Co-ordination of Studies
7. Role of Universities
8. Policies and Programs for Declining Areas
9. Co-ordination of Planning

1. DEFICIENCIES IN DATA

As a result of their experiences in attempting to get certain

kinds of information necessary to do their work, the seminar participants were in a position to make a number of points as to where there are deficiencies in the basic economic and demographic data available on Alberta.

Mr. Farran of the Task Force on Provincial-Municipal Financing indicated areas where he found information lacking.

- a) No one knows the gross provincial product.
- b) How much does the Federal Government take out of the Province and how much does it put back in?
- c) What is the debt load of cities -- is it too great?
- d) No one knows how much Albertans can afford to pay for the services of the Provincial Government.
- e) Little knowledge re future strength of economy -- are we overspending in terms of long term economic health?
- f) How much will commercial values of property rise? How will this affect the mill rate?
- g) What are the projections for hospital and education costs for example?
- h) How do escalating land values affect planning?
- i) What kind of incentives can one offer smaller areas?
- j) Is there anything one wishes to do about the rural population's age structure which is growing older.

k) If the Alberta Government were considering giving relief to those on fixed income--the majority of whom may be senior citizens--how many would this involve? How many own their own residences, how many rent them?

Others raised questions about the availability of data on net migration in or out of individual communities, and about industrial statistics for small areas.

With regard to smaller declining communities, however, there was some question as to whether this had not been "studied to death". The response to this was that as a general phenomenon this may be so, but the fact remains that there is a dearth of data available to planners in Alberta working on this problem -- for instance, data useful for designating potential growth centres.

It was pointed out that a good deal of information people indicated they need will be available soon from the 1971 census, the results of which for the most part, to be released in 1972. It was noted that the new Statistics Act provides Statistics Canada with access to income tax returns, thus increasing its store of information.

On the other hand, it was emphasized that in considering what information we would like to have as researchers, we must be aware of the sensitive issues involved in asking people to provide this information -- either because of its personal nature, or because of the burden it puts on respondents. As well, information from Statistics Canada may

not be in the most valuable form to people such as regional planners working at the local level. For these people, data collection by the province or aid to local researchers to do their own data collecting could be a valuable supplementary source of data to that provided by Statistics Canada.

The desirability of a full national census every five years was discussed -- there being general agreement that it would be invaluable to researchers but obviously expensive. Perhaps if provincial governments felt the expense worth it however, they could make presentation to Ottawa to this effect, though it is questionable that anything could be done by 1976.

With regard to information on industry for smaller areas, it was pointed out that there is a difficulty inasmuch as the information is regarded as confidential by industries. Statistics are required, therefore, to be presented in a large enough grouping that they do not reveal the specific details of any one industry. It was regarded as unlikely that this requirement would be changed.

2. RETRIEVAL OF DATA AVAILABLE

The major point raised here was that although large amounts of data and information are available now in the province, it is spread

over many departments and agencies. It is often an inefficient and time consuming operation to discover who has what. The value of a central agency which would be responsible for assembling or indexing the available information was apparent to the people attending the seminar. It was suggested that data should be stored according to common units of geographic area, so that the results of one piece of research or one agency's collection of statistics could be compared with others. Where at present there are data banks of a kind established by different departments and agencies for their own use, there are few linkages among them, even though they often use the same facilities. It was further suggested that a new orientation toward information getting is necessary. It must be seen in terms of ongoing operations over the long term. One idea put forth was that both social and economic equivalents to soil survey reports be developed, using large scale maps and interpretive texts.

The consensus among seminar members was that action should be taken to rationalize the present system and that the Alberta Bureau of Statistics was the logical agency to assume this responsibility.

Mr. Istvanffy of the A.B.S. noted that a report and recommendations dealing with this matter had been submitted to the previous government prior to the election. It was suggested that the M.L.A.'s attending bring this to the attention of the present government, and that others ask various

Cabinet Ministers to look closely at the recommendations which were presented to the previous government.

3. ECONOMIC GROWTH STUDIES

The major question raised here was on the work underway to determine the Gross Provincial Product.

The Alberta Bureau of Statistics is undertaking this work and Mr. Istvanffy noted that it should take at least three to five years to arrive at such a figure. In this connection it was noted that A.B.S. has not been used to undertake analytical projects of this kind, but rather to be a statistics storage, and to some extent a collection, agency.

An outline was given of the various substantial difficulties in developing a gross provincial product -- difficulties owing to the nature of the information required which often at a provincial level must be based on approximations and estimates.

It was noted also that a number of Regional Planning Commissions are conducting regional economic studies, and that these are encountering similar information difficulties.

This whole matter of economic growth studies was one which a number of people felt required further investigation.

4. POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND MOBILITY STUDIES

The questionnaires returned by agencies for the seminar summarized current studies relating to the amount and distribution of growth in Alberta. A number of these studies include general estimates on future growth of population -- including studies dealing with utility requirements, housing, hospital needs, regional planning land requirements, etc.

Population projections by various agencies for the province as a whole have been collected by the Red Deer Regional Planning Commission; they are shown in Appendix 2. One of the most commonly used projections for the province as a whole are the estimates of the Alberta Oil and Gas Conservation Board.

Among the agencies represented at the seminar there appeared to be a general awareness of the work being done by each other. It was noted that while some savings might be made by reducing the number of agencies making population projections and undertaking other basic projects, there could be some advantage in having overlap here provided the bases for the different approaches being taken were clearly understood. This would require those working on such matters to be in close contact with each other so that they could compare assumptions and possibly correct each others' errors.

The Alberta Bureau of Statistics, it was indicated, will be

preparing new population projections for the province once the 1971 census data is available. It is planned to obtain comment from other agencies as the projections are being prepared.

5. STUDIES ON THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Mr. McLean of the Alberta Hospital Services Commission outlined the two year study being undertaken by that commission on health services. This will include an inventory of present facilities, estimates of future needs and proposals for a more rational structure of services for each region. In determining future needs, the study will review the population projections contained in other studies.

Mr. Wilkinson of the Alberta Government Telephones indicated the very detailed information which his agency is collecting for the urban areas they service. This is usually updated yearly. The information is in the main, available to public agencies and could be of considerable value for any planning activity.

6. CO-ORDINATION OF STUDIES

(i) Index of Studies

Many participants at the seminar suggested that they would benefit from an index of studies and research underway which is relevant to their work. A number of agencies are now attempting to meet this need.

The Inter-Government Committee on Urban and Regional Research has set up a very useful index of any studies having to do with development being undertaken by governmental agencies. This Committee is sponsored by the federal government and the provinces and is restricted to inter-governmental exchanges. Unfortunately, universities cannot participate in the program. There were suggestions that the Committee's approach be replicated in Alberta and in the other direction, that it include some of the research being undertaken across North America, not just that being undertaken in Canada.

The Planning Branch of the Department of Municipal Affairs maintains now an index of planning studies in Alberta and this could be expanded and more widely distributed.

The University of Alberta is now establishing a research register to be updated every six months.

Mr. Moroney of the Alberta Research Council suggested that some attention be paid to the great amount of work underway in developing storage and rapid retrieval systems for engineering research. He also referred people to the Information Retrieval Association in the province which has been in existence for several years.

It was indicated that the Provincial Library does not assume the role of indexing, and collecting on a systematized basis, departmental studies.

In general, a need was expressed for some agency to assume responsibility for preparing an index of research studies on Alberta. Whether this should be the Alberta Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Municipal Affairs or the Inter-Governmental Committee is a matter which could be discussed among these agencies.

(ii) Regular Meetings of Researchers

A number of people present suggested that many government department researchers know fairly well, in general, what each other is doing now. However, they also agreed that regularized meeting sessions would be useful to supplement the informal process. Besides sharing information, participants at such meetings could discuss the overall interrelationships of their work in terms of:

- a) co-ordination of data collection and storage
- b) co-ordination of data analysis
- c) co-ordination of research projects with government program agencies; (for example, ensuring that if two different departments are investigating possible growth centres in a region, that at least each knows the questions the other is asking and the conclusions he is drawing, so that one does not, say, designate a "housing" growth centre and another designate a different "industry" growth centre.)

(iii) Provincial Guidelines for Research

It was suggested further that it might be useful for the provincial government, perhaps through one of its agencies, to develop guidelines as to the kinds of research projects which would be useful to it and other bodies in formulating policies. Such guidelines would perhaps, at a minimum list the priorities for various possible research projects and even more actively could establish an overall program for governmental research. It was suggested for instance, that were a list of priority research projects to be published by the government, graduate students at the universities might find such a list useful for seeking relevant thesis topics.

7. ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

It was pointed out in the discussion that the universities contain a large reservoir of professional competence and research capability. Only to a limited extent is this being used in coping with the development problems in Alberta.

It was recognized and accepted that much of the research work in the universities is dependent on the interests and specialities of the staff and graduate students. It was pointed out however, by Professor Ironside, that more direct discussion between the government and the universities could result in a better use of this research resource in solving present provincial problems.

8. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR DECLINING AREAS

The primary objective of the seminar was to consider data and research on population growth, economic growth and the distribution of activity across the province.

However, since the seminar included municipal, provincial, federal and private agencies, it was considered of value to discuss briefly at least, possible approaches to declining areas in the province, particularly since the Task Force on Urbanization and the Future and the Task Force on New Incentives for Albertans are concerned with this matter.

In this context Mr. Tamney of the Department of Regional and Economic Expansion outlined in some detail the approach of the Federal Government and its provisions for incentive grants. The aim is economic growth in an area, not simply industrial development.

In the course of the discussion a number of issues were raised.

Would it not be more rational to provide incentives for investment in selected growth centres rather than allow industry created by incentives to be randomly distributed?

The issue of equity was raised. How fair is it to subsidize an industry which will compete with a similar industry in another area which is not eligible for subsidies? If an area has potential to host an economically viable industry anyway, is it necessary to subsidize it?

If the industry is not economically viable, then perhaps another kind of social program would be more appropriate.

A third question raised was the degree to which Ottawa should decide regional development policies in a province -- which, it was noted, it is more likely to do in the absence of a provincial plan.

Are our incentive programs unduly restricted to manufacturing industry as compared with cultural, tourist or other commercial activities? Are they unduly restricted to large industries? The response to this latter question was that D.R.E.E. provides a minimum of \$30,000 capital, the provincial programs \$10,000.

Brief reference was made to local development corporations as one means of attracting industry to smaller centres. It was suggested that the major problem for smaller communities in attracting growth-creating activities may be the lack of highly skilled professional staff able to work out strategies to promote development. It is unlikely that the smaller communities themselves can afford such help. In that case, how do we provide this kind of know-how to the smaller communities?

Another problem noted was that a very large proportion of industrial development does not wish to buy land or construct buildings itself, but rather wishes to lease land and rent buildings. Our smaller centres are ill-equipped to meet this demand. Could something be done here by the province, or perhaps at the regional level, to meet this need?

Finally, it was suggested that we be careful about programs which are to be uniform throughout the province. The situation varies considerably across the provinces -- witness the difference in farm size and age structures between north and south in the province, for instance.

9. CO-ORDINATION OF PLANNING

A good deal of time was spent discussing planning in Alberta in terms of provincial planning, departmental planning, and regional planning. It was suggested that the regional planners could be more effective if a clear provincial policy were established for them to work within. Such a provincial policy would also be effective in co-ordinating the work of various provincial departments and research agencies crossing departmental lines such as H.R.R.C. and the Task Force on Urbanization. It was not made clear, however, just what the content of a provincial plan might be, though there was some discussion on the differential allocation of funds among regions as one item that must be a part of such a plan. In any event, it was emphasized that such a provincial plan must be developed within the context of the provincial budget and this requires more complete financial statistics.

The discussion then turned full circle back to the need for data in general if planning is to proceed well at any level.

The growth centre concept was discussed at some length. It was pointed out that the same places must be identified as growth centres by different departments (by federal departments as well as provincial) -- not only so that there is a concentration of activities in the chosen centre, but so that there will be a balance of activity, as say, between industry and "infra-structure". Slave Lake was given as an example where such co-ordination has taken place not only among provincial departments but as well with the federal Department of Regional and Economic Expansion -- perhaps because of the latter.

The role of a group such as the Task Force on Urbanization and the Future was discussed as a means of helping to ensure that it is not just the planners who pick growth centres, but regional people as well; though, as it was noted, the regional planning commission structure provides many safeguards in this respect as well.

The importance of bodies such as Regional Planning Commissions in ensuring that locational decisions are made locally so far as possible, and always made with local inputs, was emphasized: it was suggested however, that we must be careful that negative inter-regional competition does not simply replace unhealthy inter-community competition.

Finally, reference was made to the hodgepodge of regional boundaries in the province -- very few provincial departments or agencies have congruent boundaries with others. This makes implementation of plans

difficult. For instance, in attempting to establish growth centres, if a certain place is central to a region designated by one service agency, but peripheral to a second, there is unlikely to be agreement on designating the spot a growth centre where offices are to be concentrated.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

While this seminar was not intended as one at which conclusions would be reached or recommendations issued, there was, on a number of issues, substantial agreement. The areas of agreement appeared to be the following:

1. Data Bank -- It was recognized that for the researcher there will always be the problem that not all the data he would like can be gathered. However, to ensure maximum use of what data has been gathered, and to avoid duplication in collecting information, it is important that provincial agencies, possibly with the universities, develop a data bank system of some kind. Through such a data bank the information which is collected by one agency can be easily acquired by another. Common geographical units, of something like enumeration area size, could be used and there might be initiated continuing basic data collection schemes and large scale mapping.

2. Co-ordination of Studies -- A greater co-ordination of

studies which are being undertaken by government agencies and to some extent being undertaken by universities in Alberta, might be effected through governmental action as follows:

- (i) establishment of a careful indexing system for research on growth and its distribution in Alberta
- (ii) bringing together researchers and planners on some fairly formal and regular basis. Participants could share information and discuss the overall inter-relationships of their work in terms of:
 - (a) co-ordination of research--from data collection through to co-operation in undertaking projects, and
 - (b) ensuring that research and planning is not directed toward a number of different ends because of different assumptions--for example, in picking different growth centres
- (iii) setting government research priorities as guidelines for government agencies and for the information of private groups
- (iv) development of an explicit governmental program to organize growth-related research

3. A Provincial Plan -- Planning in Alberta would be more effective at all levels if the provincial government would develop in

broad strokes a "provincial plan". This could guide provincial departments, regional planning commissions, and the Federal Government as well as keeping somewhat consistent provincial cabinet policies. It could help prevent different authorities working in conflicting directions and would enable the public to better understand and criticize decisions which are taken and local plans which are proposed.

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